

duties than of his rights. The outstanding statement in the book for me came in the first page of the introduction – 'almost all the time the interests of the health care provider and the patient are the same'. Doctors have always subscribed to this sentiment but how refreshing to see it acknowledged by those whose interests lie in health law rather than in patient care.

That the gulf between lawyer and doctor is by no means bridged is however made very apparent when one reads that 'understanding of the law can be as important to the proper care of patients as an understanding of emergency medical procedures or proper drug dosages'.

The scope of the book is indeed very much wider than its title might have one believe. Much basic information is given and a number of misconceptions corrected. As an example of the former the reader learns that the cost of malpractice insurance premiums rose from 250 million dollars in 1970 to 2 billion dollars in 1980.

That the American doctor runs enormous risks in assisting at roadside accidents has for years been firmly believed by many in the UK. The authors firmly nail that one by telling us that there has been 'not one reported case in which a health care professional in this country has had to pay any money damages to anyone suing him for stopping and rendering aid and allegedly aggravating the patient's condition . . .'

The book is written in the form of question and answer and this format permits the authors to cover a great deal of medical law in a manner readable to doctor and nurse. The profession's duty in respect of the disabled doctor is considered and the relationship between doctor and hospital administrator is explored.

Nursing and the law is investigated in some detail as are the respective liabilities of doctors, nurses and other health care professionals. The role of the social worker in the US is stated to be still ill-defined.

The chapters on consent, human experimentation and research and privacy and confidentiality emphasise to me the great similarities which exist between UK and US law. The chapter on the Union movement in health care in institutions is perhaps somewhat out of place in a book of this nature, but the one on malpractice litigation is a mine of information.

The appendices, which include a glossary of legal terms and an excellent

index, conclude a book produced at a price which should ensure its purchase by all who have any interest in medical law in the United States.

J LEAHY TAYLOR  
Secretary  
Medical Protection Society  
London

## Light in Darkness: Disabled Lives?

Papers on some contemporary medical problems, collected by the Medical Committee, Order of Christian Unity, London  
Oxford, Unity Press, Mowbray and Co Ltd  
£2.25

Here are 12 papers, mostly short and mostly new, though some are re-printed from elsewhere. There are three sections: (i) A Positive Approach to Life; (ii) Potential in Disability, and (iii) Dignity in Dying. The British authors are well known and I assume that is true of those from the USA. The sections are preceded by an introduction on 'Some Dilemmas of Modern Medicine' by Sir John Peel. The general theme is the prevention and alleviation of disabilities, coping with disabilities and, in the end, coping with terminal illness. This theme was particularly appropriate in the International Year of the Disabled when the book was published. The attitudes of medical folk, the social services, parents and relatives are discussed, in addition to that of the sufferer. The aim of the book is to present a strong case against dealing with disabilities by any form of euthanasia or (with very few exceptions) by abortion. A Christian basis is advanced for this stance. Three of the contributors: Pat Seed, Gordon Scorer and Leonard Cheshire produce Christian meditations to support it. But how one moves from a basic stance to these particular ethical decisions is not discussed; nor why some Christians have arrived at different ones. The chapter on 'Why Abortion?' by a lecturer in logic, himself a paraplegic, does not resolve it. In his introduction Sir John says 'One of the difficulties that doctors have in the whole field of ethics is that morality is about absolutes . . . the value of human life is infinite. Doctors on the other

hand are all the time having to make decisions based on the relative . . .'. Moral theory, however, is about both; and the phrase about human life by itself does not resolve the issues of medical ethics discussed in this book. A section of the report *On Dying Well*, produced by the Board of Social Responsibility of the Church of England in 1974 is reproduced and reads well after eight years. The publishers claim that the book is 'refreshingly new'. It is not. But its warnings and its positive points are important, if not as decisive as it thinks.

PROFESSOR RONALD PRESTON  
Faculty of Theology  
University of Manchester

## The Politics of Contraception: Birth Control in the Year 2001

Carl Djerassi  
San Francisco/Oxford, W H Freeman  
and Co  
£14.80 (paperback £6.95)

*The Politics of Contraception* was first published in 1979. This is a welcome re-issue with a new preface and an added article *Birth Control in the Year 2001* although this does little more than summarise the contents of the original book.

Djerassi is a chemist who was closely involved in the synthesis of the first oral contraceptive (the book includes an account of the chemical development of the Pill) but his interest in contraception is not only that of a scientist. He is concerned about world population growth and sees the control of fertility as the most urgent social issue of the next 20 years. He is also an industrialist who is very frank about the profit motive behind much scientific research in the United States. The result is a fascinating book which considers the factors that affect the development, availability and use of contraceptive methods in the present and discusses how the interaction between science, industry and public policy may affect future developments.

Djerassi touches on a number of ethical issues but his concern with consequences rather than with rights limits